CHAPTER I

LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Location—Bella Coola Village—Tribal Organization—Neighbouring Tribes

Location

"BELLA COOLA" is the common designation of those Indians who, until a few years ago, inhabited the valley of the Bella Coola River in central British Columbia. How has recorded that the name is a mis-pronunciation of *Nuxalk*,[1] a Kwakiutl word of doubtful origin which white pioneers assumed to be the appellation of the people in question. There is no term in their own language to include the groups treated in this monograph. Linguistically, the Bella Coola form an isolated island of Salish-speaking people, separated from others of the same stock by tribes of Athapascan and Kwakiutl language.[2] Culturally, they belong to the central section of the North Pacific coast area.[3]

The Bella Coola River rises among the mountainous uplands of central British Columbia. Its two main branches fall rapidly, almost forty-five miles from the sea, into two deep gorges which unite, some five miles further on, to form the valley of the Bella Coola. Above this the river widens to serpentine curves (see Plate 3). The shallow and ice-rapid for the use of large boats, even if such had been known to the Bella Coola, it serves to bear their dug-out canoes, and it forms from some eighty miles. The valley is never wider than two or three miles and is hemmed in by lofty snow-capped mountains.

[illegible]

(c) THE BELLA COOLA INDIANS

from Dwáldi. My informant's grandchildren regard themselves as Dwáldi boys, and their names are embodied in myths of that village, although their fathers have not lived there for two generations. There is no reason to suppose this case exceptional. Other instances were obtained of movements of people from one village to another at earlier times, and there seems no reason to doubt the general accuracy of these. Names embodied in the origin myths of different towns are used as prerogatives and have been potent factors in keeping their memory alive. Uncertainties and inconsistencies there must be in the foregoing list, but on the whole it appears to be fairly reliable, since few contradictions were received from different informants.

Accounts obtained of the same ceremonies from the descendants of people of different villages were found to most often to be identical. There were a few differences in custom between the people of Dean and those of the other upper valley towns on the one hand, and the inhabitants of the lower valley on the other. These will be mentioned when necessary, but on the whole the inhabitants of the Bella Coola valley can be considered as a tribal entity.

Boas (p. 38) gives a list of Bella Coola towns which agrees fairly well with the above. Among his villages are included Ts'xoā (no. 2), Tsā'lqaxtlaux (no. 7), and Tsā'xōlx (no. 10).[1] All the older people agreed that these are the names of streams, though settlements located on them may have been known by the same designations. Names of the five villages recorded by Boas, nos. 1, 3, 5, 13, and 14, were not known to several old men questioned on the subject.

The villages of the Bella Coola valley did not form a political unit; each was independent. A common language was spoken throughout and the inhabitants of the different towns recognized their origin and customs were similar. This was also recognized to be the case with regard to the people living on South Bentinck Arm, and on the head of Dean Channel.

[1] Kitlag is not on the spelling of this monograph.

NEA Bellacoola NEA

upward out on to a wooden platform, which served as sidewalk and extended from one end of the settlement to the other. The outer side of this structure was always supported on piles; in fact, in many cases, the house as well as the whole sidewalk were thus raised from the ground. This type of construction was necessitated by the sloping sites of the villages, but had the added advantage of being a protection against attack. The villages differed in size from insignificant settlements of three or four houses, to ones with twenty or thirty, each containing several families. The ease with which the red cedar could be split and worked in large planks made possible the construction of these large, rectangular houses which, with their horizontally laid wall and sloping roofs, presented a picture of stability and relative comfort superior to that of most Indian habitations.

Each village was practically an independent political unit. Neighbouring settlements of many common interests which drove them into contact with one another, but there was no organized cohesion between the towns of the Bella Coola valley, as between those of Wuikinuxv and Kimsquit. There was still less to drive them into groups together. There was no supreme chief and no governmental meeting of the tribe as a whole. Not only were the two divisions not bound to support one another in war, but wars often at loggerheads among themselves. Indeed, bloodshed between towns of the Bella Coola valley itself was not uncommon. Moreover, each group tended to merge with its neighbours. The Wuikinuxv people frequently married with the Owikeno Indians and the Bella Bella, the Kimsquit with the Lekumtl Dean Channel and the Kitlope of Gardner Canal, and the Bella Coola of the upper valley with the Carriers.

In spite of these inconsistencies, the application of the word tribe is justifiable for the following reasons:

A. Language. All spoke the same language. There were dialectical differences among the people of Bella Coola, Wuikinuxv, and Kimsquit, but each group could understand the [illegible]

b:McDowell E-5 (922-1924) 1948
NEA Bellacoola NEA

others. This differentiated them clearly from all neighbouring tribes.

B. Ceremonies. A member of a secret society in any of the above towns was accepted as a member in any other one. A person of another tribe, even if known to belong to a comparable society, was treated as an uninitiated person.

C. Origin and Religion. The people of Bella Coola, Tā'ō'ic, and Kimsquit felt themselves to be akin through acceptance of the fact that their ancestors had been created together in the beginning of time. This marked them off with great clearness from all other tribes, especially from the Carriers of the interior. This belief formed a sentimental and religious bond of great strength.

Neighbouring Tribes

It is desirable to describe, briefly, the tribes with which the Bella Coola came in contact.

The Carriers

East of Bella Coola, amid the mountains of the interior, roved the Carriers. In summer they often came down to the river valley to fish or wait for salmon, and in winter they were sometimes forced by cold and starvation again to visit the Bella Coola, Bella Bella, or Rivers Inlet people. There was a good deal of intermarriage between them and the inhabitants of the upper valley, so that the wanderers were able to spend the cold months with relatives. Since the loss, the Bella Coola considered these people utterly foreign in habits and beliefs, and to call a man a "Carrier" was, and still is, a deadly insult. The Carriers lacked the rich ceremonial life of the coastal peoples who, therefore, regarded them with scorn and contempt. The presence of a few of the much-despised Carriers was, however, almost necessary to the correct performance of the winter dances since they were uninitiated spectators whom it was necessary to impress and delude.

1:McDermith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NEA Bellacoola NEA
Bellabella NES

THE *xúlmay*[1]

Before the smallpox epidemic, about 1862, there were towns on the fords and villages of Dean Channel between Kimsquit and Bella Bella. The inhabitants were called *xúlmay* by the Bella Coola, and *xnaiy* by the Bella Bella. Their settlements were at Elcho Harbour, Green River, Cascade Inlet, and at several unidentified places. Their language is said to have differed slightly from that of the Bella Bella, but the people themselves married freely with both Kimsquit and Bella Bella, thus forming a connecting link between these tribes.

A list of *xúlmay* towns was obtained from one old man, who claimed to be a descendant of the people. It was impossible to verify this information, and since he himself was not an ideal informant, the following can be regarded only as approximately correct.

(1) *Alka:* at Elcho Harbour.

(2) *Kdidz:* on a ford one mile above the last-named.

(3) *Hkkl* or *Tsqtsa:* on a river three miles above the preceding.

(4) *Nawaiid:* on a river two miles above the preceding.

(5) *Nuqual:* on a ford three miles above the preceding.

(6) *Qaalkm:* on a ford three miles above the preceding.

(7) *Sarmalk:* on a river two miles above the last-named and thirty miles below Kimsquit.

According to the old man from whom the above list was obtained, *Nawaiid*, at Kimsquit, mentioned earlier as village no. 4, was also populated by *xúlmay* people. There was so much intermarriage between the two groups that it is now impossible to ascertain whether the inhabitants are only of *Nawaiid*, but of *Sarmalk* as well, were predominantly Kimsquit or *xúlmay*.

The open plateau in which the Bella Coola River rises has always made travel possible for long distances, so that one only

[1 "Bellacoola, term for the people of inland Bellabella - Kimsquit stock who inhabited the shores of Dean Channel" - Boas (1 McIlwraith, Ref. 10, p.284 - Analyst)]

U.Mc.Dorsett E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NEA Bellacoola NFS

the neighbouring Carriers, but Chilkotin as well sometimes descended to the valley. On the coast, though the dense undergrowth prevented travel along the shore, the long fiords, shadowed from the open Pacific, were ideal for the use of canoes.* Comparatively lengthy journeys were neither difficult nor uncommon. The *Tal'io* people were usually on amicable terms with the inhabitants of Rivers Inlet, and the Kimsquit with the Kitlope. The Bella Coola were accustomed to attend potlatches at Alert Bay and Fort Rupert,* Knight's Inlet, and Bute Inlet, receiving their hosts, in turn, at Bella Coola. On the other hand, there was little friendly intercourse with the northern tribes, of which the Kitkatla especially were dreaded by the residents of the central coast. Until recent years the Bella Coola had no direct knowledge of other Salish-speaking peoples, although some of the Chilkotin told them of a tribe living far to the south, in the interior, whom they encountered in some of their wanderings and used to term *Nuxalkmc*, recognizing the similarity between their language and that of the Bella Coola. A few years ago several Bella Coola attended a boarding-school and were amazed to find that many of their words were understood by fellow-students from Chilliwack.

To sum up: The Bella Coola were in close contact with the neighbouring general tribes, with the members of which they felt themselves to have cultural affinities. They recognize that they have received many ceremonial rites from their neighbours, and must have adopted other elements of culture which they now consider indigenous. It is probable that certain Bella Coola customs must likewise have been transmitted to other tribes, but such lie without the scope of this monograph. The outlying villages were in close contact with foreign neighbours, and tended to assimilate elements of their culture, but, on the whole, the Bella Coola present a tribal unity with distinctive local customs, falling within the general pattern of coastal culture.

*For name of canoe, see Appendix A.
*The principal Kwakiutl villages.

Library of the American Museum of Natural History
Boas Collection

special type of whistle. Kaeqaitlimox remained in this house until he had given four potlatches. Then he removed to Ayat'i, near Tal'os River on South Bentinck Arm. His house still stands there, but it has become an island around which the clouds mass whenever a hostile raiding party is approaching, so as to conceal from them their objective.

From their long residence in this house Tal'os people understand the language of their Bella Bella, Rivers Inlet, and other coastal neighbours better than do the Bella Coola.

ORIGIN MYTH OF TAL'OS[1]

Among the first people sent down to earth were four who landed at the river Tal'os, on the mainland opposite Rivers Inlet. Their names were: Wintcumdelx, a man who became the leader of the group; Nyad'a-lats, a woman; Awalkumelem, a man; and another woman, Gumemaltsamx. They met a wasp, which helped them by pointing out the proper road to follow and by killing evil things which barred their path. With his assistance they were able to reach Tal'os, where they settled and where Wintcumdelx plucked a number of twigs from the branches of a spruce tree near the water. These twigs became the people over whom he was chief.

ORIGIN MYTH OF NUQUI[2]

In the beginning of time there came down to Mount Saanich, near the mouth of the Fraser River, two brothers, Tsimsem and Nuqui, their sister Kalkun, and their barrel Kaqa'ya. Tsimsem came as an eagle, but at once assumed human form, apparently the others had always been human. They moved down, and formed a settlement at Nuqui, near the mouth of the Fraser River. Tsimsem had brought with him as a present from Ahyuwitlin some chickens, called by their supernatural name, Alpaxstem q, which he threw into the water. They increased rapidly and became the ancestors of all the chickens at Kimsquit. Thus provided with food, the brothers prospered so that they were able to give many potlatches. In course of time Kalkun was married to Nuklilk, a chief who had come to earth on the upper Dean River.

On one of their potlatches Nuqui performed a fairylike dance, as Ahyuwitlin had instructed him to do before leaving Nuqui q. Valuable

[1] Fragmentary version, related by Billy Saltspring.

[2] An earlier version see Boas, p. 67. It was impossible to obtain this myth from any of the descendants of Nuqui. It is unlikely that the above version does it justice.

PHONETIC KEY*

vowels	consonants
a, as in father	b, d, f, g (as in English), h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, z, as in English
ä, as in hat	q, voiceless ŋ
e, as in bet	ɓ', ɗ', ƙ', ɠ', implosive stops
i, as in pique	ɓ, ɗ, ƙ, ɠ, glottalized stops
o, as in note	ʃ, voiceless palatal s
ö, as in nob	ʒ, voiceless palatal z
u, as in flue	ŋ, ɲ, intermediate between ng and ny sounds
ü, as in mat	ɗ, glottalized intermediate
ı, as in Bill	ʤ, as in jade
ʊ, as in put	ʧ, as ch in chief
ə, obscure vowel like a in alike	ʔ, spiranted ʔ
ˈ, stigmatic vowels, voiced but slighted in enunciation. The same terms is used for consonants slighted in enunciation.	ɦ, ɾ, x, ɣ
	ʔ, glottalized ʔ
	ɾ, as in Scottish, hurl
	ɣ, letter ɣ, as in German, ach
	ɯ, voiceless palatal ɣ, as in German, ich
	ɣ, peculiar r-sound, apparently due

ˌ, for example, a, ä ı, indicates heightening of preceding vowel in timbre

ˈ, indicates a glottal stop

ˈ, indicates aspiration

ˈ, indicates accentuation of the syllable or element

*Based on the simpler system described in Pikunni Proverbs and Tales, Anthropological Publications, Vol. III, No. 2, Philadelphia (1918), pp. 5-11.

The r sound was used only by one old man and several of his deceased grandfathers.

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2:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NEs Bellacoola NEs

[The Breaker Dance]

they do not like. No compensation can be claimed, on the theory that supernatural beings do not have to pay for any damage they may do. Although the property of some *kukwa'nat* is destroyed, the chief sufferers are the uninitiated; this serves to increase their fear and respect for the society with which such all-powerful beings are in league. After visiting every house in the village, the party returns to X's, where the masks are burnt, the call sent back, and the proceedings conclude in the usual manner.

A certain amount of information concerning the history of the Breaker dance was obtained from *Lpak*, the owner of the prerogative just described. He is a well-informed man, but the writer had no opportunity of comparing his beliefs with those of his associates, so the following must be regarded as unsubstantiated evidence. This man stated that the Breaker dance is the most important of all in Bella Bella, and that many Bella Coola prerogatives have been obtained from this source, although some of their first ancestors likewise enjoyed it. He further stated that the term, *nalaxsa*, by which the Bella Coola always designate a Breaker, is of Bella Bella origin, and that the ancient Bella Coola term was *dettia*.* *Lpak* also told of an occasion when a number of Bella Bella, present on the *qulax* night of a Bella Coola ceremony, were disturbed when eating by the thud of a stone thrown, from outside, against the wall of the back room. Out rushed a number of *kukwa'nat*, incensed at the disrespect shown to their gathering. They caught the offender, but released him when he was found to be a Bella Bella Breaker, foolishly demonstrating his prowess. The marshals decided to retaliate and arranged with two Bella Coola Breakers to exercise their rights and destroy the canoes and food-boxes of their guests. They did so, and later paid for the damage. The Bella Coola were thus able to demon-

Lpak and several of his children are the only Bella Coola known to the writer who habitually use the sound "x." For example, he says "*Daqlax*," instead of "*Daqlak*." The ears that he is himself unable to distinguish any peculiarity in his own pronunciation, although other Bella Coola are aware of it.

6:Boas E-5 (1886-ca. 1890)1892
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

Since the end of the last century they have dwindled down in numbers, and a few only of their once populous villages are still inhabited, namely, Sáiq, at the head of Dean Inlet; Kuil'vł, at the mouth of Salmon River; Nuqu'kin (which embraces five villages, at the mouth of Bella Coola River; Sus'us, twenty-eight miles up Bella Coola River; and Ts'ists, at the head of South Dentzsch Arm. The dialect of Kuil'vł and Sáiq differs slightly from that of the other villages. The following is a list of their ancient villages, most of which are still inhabited at certain seasons, although not regularly:—

1. Sáiq.
2. Kuil'vł. The tribe of this place is called Sináiłmox.
3. Nuqu'kin, embracing the villages K'nukst'es and Sináiłmł on the south side, Tl'ielle and Nuxaiłmukmł on the south side of the river.
4. Stoqłł.
5. Tsemst'eil.
6. Sust'x'ełt.
7. Ts'k'aitle.
8. Aut'emut.
9. Nak q'aqmaitx.
10. Tsqemik'stx.
11. Xa'ak'ułst.
12. Nuxłłst'aq.
13. Sus'us, twenty-eight miles from the sea.

14. Sust'q'aiuk. Nos. 4 to 14 are situated along Bella Coola River, and are given as they are met with in ascending the river.

15. Sta'aqłł, at the confluence of Bella Coola and Dean (?) Rivers.
16. Ts'ists, at the head of South Dentzsch Arm, embracing K'na'ya, Ts'ists, Ts'ik', Kłaq.
17. K'na'ilem, at the bay of that name in the southern extremity of Dentzsch Arm. On the north entrance of Dentzsch Arm were the K'ilst'ił, but it is doubtful whether they belonged to the Bilqula or to the Sk'ómish. The latter call the people of Dean Inlet K'ulmaitq.

Each of these tribes is subdivided into gentes, which appear to be arranged in exogamic groups. I herein the names of the following gentes, which bear the names of their ancestors:—

Gentes of the Nuqu'kinox:

1. Tsk-ai'a (extending down on his family).
2. Sqaqqmut'inox; Qé'sxotsa name: Sta'aqyłaił (see p. 621).
3. Nuxłłqłł'ax.
4. K'a'łaqł-ax.
5. Ts'ists.

Gentes of the Nuxk'q'aitinox:

1. Ttłak'aemst'ał.
2. K'aeqsk'ał.
3. ?

Gentes of the Tsists'ax:

1. Sáiciłmukł (extending quite far); Qé'sxotsa name: Ts'ists-taiłł (see note preceding these lists).
2. Qaaiaił.
3. Tłaaqqut'ałqax.
4. Sta'aiułł.

[illegible]

[illegible]

I.

The Bella Coola are a small tribe inhabiting the coast of New Inlet and Bentinck Arm, two long and narrow fiords situated in about 52° north, in British Columbia. Their habitat extends along Bella Coola River, which empties into Bentinck Arm. The name 'Bella Coola' is a corruption of the word 'Billhula,' by which name the tribe is known to the Kwakiutl. There is no word in their own language embracing all the tribes speaking the Bella Coola language. It seems that at a former time the tribe was quite populous; but, owing to various epidemics and the introduction of alien diseases, as hereafter here detailed shown, as that at the present time it has been reduced to only a few hundred souls. The language spoken by the tribe belongs to the Salishan family, more particularly to the group of dialects spoken along the coasts of Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The great similarity between the Bella Coola and the other Coast-Salishan dialects leads me to assume that at no time the tribes speaking these dialects inhabited contiguous areas. At the present time the Bella Coola are separated from other tribes speaking Salishan languages by a considerable extent of country, which is inhabited by tribes of Athapascan and Kwakiutl lineage. Vocabulary and grammar have been highly modified, particularly by an extensive choice of words. The relation of their language to the other dialects of the Coast Salish is similar to that of the Tillamook, another language belonging to the Salishan family, which is spoken on the coast of Oregon, to an area separated from the rest of the Salishan territory by the district inhabited by the Chinook.

Physically the Bella Coola bear evidence of long-continued contact with the northern Coast tribes and also with the Athapascan tribes of the interior. Extensive intermarriages have been quite frequent, as result of the fact that present physical appearance differs considerably from that of the southern Salishan tribes, of whom they form a branch. The same is true in regard to their customs and beliefs, which differ fundamentally from those of the southern Salishan tribes.

In the present paper I shall describe the mythology of the Bella Coola, and discuss its development.

II.

The previous knowledge of the mythology of this tribe is based on studies made by Count Jacobsen, Philip Jacobsen, Tolmie, and the writer. In 1885 I published a few brief notes on their traditions.[1] Tolmie pub-

[1] Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, 1885, p. 451.